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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the establishment of subsystems such as legitimized committees or departments to prepare school organizations for innovation and to make the transition to a changed mode of operation smoother. The subsystems are to be primarily composed of school district personnel attempting new patterns of action. The district subsystems should be organized into larger clusters to insure effective communication among interdependent educational organizations such as R & D centers, regional educational laboratories, universities, State departments of education, commercial agencies, and other sources of innovative materials and training. (Author/MLF)

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Linking Organizations to Maintain Organizational Development and Transmit Innovation

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Every newly growing thing is fragile. This is true of patterns of action as well as of whole creatures. In a human individual or organization, a new skill of practice is frail before it becomes stable. The transition to a changed mode of operation is especially delicate in an organization when the new mode must tear out old protective alliances, devalue once-proud expertness, or weaken the claims of members on the familiar provinces of their duties. In organizations such as schools, having numerous and strongly-sanctioned norms, special institutional supports are necessary if old patterns of interaction are to yield their potency and new patterns are to become stable. This paper proposes an institutional device to prepare school organizations for innovation and to make the transition period less chancy.

In brief, the proposal here is to establish sub-systems to carry the function of organizational development within school districts, to multiply the economic and logistic capability of these district sub-systems by organizing the sub-systems from a number of districts into larger clusters, clustering the clusters where advantageous, and connecting the clusters to R & D centers, regional educational laboratories, universities, state departments of education, commercial agencies, and other sources of

innovative materials and training. The distinctive features of this conception lie not in the idea of connecting these organizations, but in (1) using continuing organizational development as the base for the connections and (2) the nature of the connections themselves, to be explained below. At CASEA,* we are calling the organization that maintains the connections the linking organization.

Certain postulates seem reasonable. If an organization is to succeed in making alterations that require dislocations and replacements of duties and interpersonal dependencies, it will require special help in acquiring and maintaining this flexibility. The process of bringing about this adaptability is called organizational development. ** The first step in enabling a school organization to meet repeated or radical innovation successfully is to establish organizational development as a normal, continuing part of its operation.

A new function is best maintained in an organization by establishing it in a sub-system such as a legitimized committee or department. Practice is best transmitted by face-to-face interaction taking the form of the actual new practice in the normal workaday situation. Moving practice from one

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** I do not mean in this paper to single out any particular technology with this term; I mean any manner of help that enables an organization to achieve change deliberately and effectively and with minimal hurtful strain. The key idea is not to start thinking about the organization after someone has committed it to a particular innovation, but to be always ready to cope judiciously and flexibly with any new input from the environment.

organization to another takes place best if the practice can move in the same way it moves within an organization; namely, by moving through a linking organization.

Interpersonal change occurs when members of a group or organization (1) feel demands for change from themselves or from others, (2) perceive that some new pattern of action is possible (even though stressful), (3) find a way to practice the new behavior without incurring punishment, (4) find that those with whom they must interact in the new bahavior also value the new way, and (5) find that their new behavior is reciprocated and supported in the continuing workaday situation by the others involved. These requirements are as true of organizations themselves as they are of individuals within the organizations. And just as these steps require adequate communication among individuals, so they require adequate communication among organizations where new patterns of action within one organization must be supported by other organizations with which the first is interdependent. School districts, R & D centers, state departments, and certain other agencies are interdependent or can become so, and linking organizations are the surest means for insuring effective communication among them.

Linking organizations can have a variety of particular structures, but there is one feature that we believe must characterize such an organization; namely, most of the members must function primarily as members of the school district where self-renewal is to be engendered. Their salaries must be provided mostly or wholly by that organization. Depending on the sizes of the organizations involved, the members of a

linking organization may spend full time acting in that role or only part time, spending the rest of their time teaching, counseling, administering, or whatever. It is possible that a linking organization would occasionally hire consultants from outside its own organization or region. A very small linking organization might consist merely of a dozen part-time people from three or four contiguous small districts. A very large linking organization could link a number of small ones. Its members would be some of the members of the small ones; it would have additional support personnel. Large or small, a linking organization should contain members from agencies such as centers, universities, or commercial agencies that can input innovative ideas and materials.

The linking organization, as we conceive it at CASEA, differs from a distributing agency or a sales organization in certain crucial ways. (1) The linking organization is designed to transmit practice, not merely information or products. (2) The members of the linking organization are members of the "buying" organization as well as of the "selling" organization. (3) The members of the linking organization operate as teams and sub-systems, not as individuals, and they deal with teams and sub-systems, not with individuals. (4) The primary purpose of the linking organization is organizational development to maximize self-renewal. The distribution of products and particular innovations is secondary. (5) The linking organization does not seek customers who will buy a particular product. It seeks "customers" who want to be more effective in their teaching, administering, or whatever. It then helps the customers to conceive methods of solving their own problems and methods of reaching suppliers who can augment the customers' resources for carrying through their

problem-solving plan.

There is not room in this short paper to clarify all these points, and certainly not room to set forth systematically the theory on which the design rests. Perhaps the first point above will seem especially distinctive to many; let us devote a few more words to it. When members of a linking organization transmit practice, they work with the school or other unit until the "customer" is actually performing the new practice. The consultants remain on call, furthermore, indefinitely. (They can be on call and easily reachable because some or most of them are actual members of the same district or sub-district as the customers.) An additional feature of the transmission of the skills of organizational development is that the transmitters use and display those skills from the first moment of work with the customers. The skills are transmitted body-to-body, so to speak.

In transmitting practice, the practice comes first and the explanation later. This is not to say that contacts are initiated with no words at all. I only mean that we use only enough words with the customer to reach a mutual agreement that a first trial is worth making. If the first trial seems promising, we then go on with the training, offering theory, cognitive guides, and other aides to help the customer conceptualize and recall his experiences during training. Another feature of transmitting practice stems from the fact that practice in an organization rests on effective coordination among some subset of the members. Effective training, consequently, must include the members of the team involved and must give the team training as an intact, workaday unit.

This sort of dissemination differs radically from sending verbal descriptions or sample materials to someone in the organization or even from having the materials carried to the organization by a salesman. I listed the formal differences earlier. The differences in effect are as dramatic. The point of this paper is that acheiving more positive, controllable dissemination through the linking organization depends on building a true organization containing sub-systems of the original organization as full sub-systems of the new organization.

In summary, it is our intention at CASEA to test whether specialists in organizational development within school districts can organize with one another and with members of "supplying" organizations to establish a new, constantly active medium for developing and transmitting self-renewing activities. The duty of the members of the linking organization is to help any one of the original organizations to reach out for aid to any of the other organizations, and to help new practice move from anyplace to anyplace.

CASEA has already concluded the field work of a study testing whether a department or cadre of specialists in organizational development within a district can foster self-renewing activities within the district; the first results are very favorable. We are beginning a project to try faster ways of establishing cadres of specialists and to test instructional packages that can help to routinize the process. We are also planning a project that could establish the components of a true linking organization.

Linking organizations need not be build from scratch. Some existing organizations have some of the requisite features and could easily

be converted to linking organizations in our sense. One is the League of Cooperating Schools of IDEA, now existing in southern California. Another is the potential organization of the Western States Small Schools Project (WSSSP). Another is the consortium of School Study Councils in New England.

There are many nascent innovations that might grow to productive maturity with adequate nurturing. The older methods of exhortation and sink-or-swim do not seem to have been sufficiently helpful to new modes of practice. We think the linking organization offers greater promise. It provides psychological and logistic support for the individuals engaged in innovative activity. It provides legitimate paths of influence to and from schools and districts. It amplifies the resources of any one school, district, research center, or other member-organization. It makes possible the safety of multiple entry points. It increases the rate of effective information-transmission by increasing the visibility of the transmitters. And it marshals the power of face-to-face influence.